

Schools grade well in access to technology

Kentucky earns B in national report

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Kentucky earned a B grade again this year for its educational technology access, use and capacity, in a national report released Thursday.

"Technology Counts 2007" graded and ranked all 50 states and Washington, D.C., in a supplement to the 10th edition of the annual report.

Looking at the state scores, Kentucky ranked seventh in the nation, said Lisa Gross, spokeswoman for the department of education.

"Overall, we did quite well," Gross said.

Education Week and the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center conducted the report, which also looks back over its 10-year publication history.

While much progress has been made, schools have work to do in providing opportunities for students to gain proficiency in the kinds of skills needed for an increasingly digital economy, editors said.

"In the 21st century, students need more than superficial fluency with the latest high-tech gadgets; they need genuine digital literacy," said Virginia B. Edwards, the editor and publisher of Education Week and "Technology Counts 2007."

The research center gave Kentucky a C in access to technology -- what the average state received.

That category looked at the percent of students with access to computers in the classroom and in computer labs or media centers, and the number of students per instructional computer and high-speed Internet-connected computer.

Gross said the report reinforces what the state already knew -- that kids need access to technology.

"We've moved away from computer labs to getting computers in the classroom, which is difficult to do," Gross said. "And it comes down to, how new is your equipment and how fast?"

The Kentucky General Assembly has been generous in providing technology funding, especially in 2006, Gross said.

The state earned an A- in use of technology, which examined whether there are state policies for student standards and tests on technology, a virtual school and computer-based assessments.

Kentucky doesn't test students on technology, but that will continue to be discussed, Gross said.

"We've talked about it in the past, and it came back to, 'What do you ask and how do you assess?' " she said. "Some districts say you can't really pull technology out because it's so integrated into classes."

Kentucky got an A in its capacity to use technology, which looked at whether technology is included in state policies for teacher and administrator standards, initial teacher and administrator license requirements, and teacher and administrator recertification requirements.

The state fared well in all of those areas except one -- it doesn't have a policy that includes technology when recertifying administrators.

Daviess County points to its eLearning and eClassroom projects as evidence of its commitment to integrating technology into education.

Each new freshman and ninth-grade teacher gets a laptop computer, and by next year, each classroom will have a projector, screen, DVD and VHS players, audio enhancement, document camera and laptop.

The technology will be permanently affixed and easy to use, Superintendent Tom Shelton said in earlier interviews.

Both Owensboro and Daviess County districts have been using SmartBoards and online testing, and they provide access to computer technology from K-12.

Funding is the key to staying on top of changing technology, local superintendents have said.

Report tracks trends

Ten years ago, "Technology Counts" reported that fewer than two-thirds of U.S. public schools had Internet access. Only 14 percent of those had Internet-connected computers in classrooms.

Today, the study shows nearly all schools are online, and about 95 percent of instructional computers have high-speed access.

Great progress has been made in 10 years to equalize the access of computers for disadvantaged students with their more advantaged peers while they are in school, the report states. But at home, poor students have much less access.

More research is needed on education technology's effectiveness, editors said.

The real test of whether the U.S. is gaining ground in using technology to promote learning will be when students can show proficiency in "... sifting through a glut of electronic information and producing creative work that will be valued highly in the global marketplace," the report states.

On the Web

Visit <http://www.edweek.org> and find the "Technology Counts 2007" report